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Letter dated 23 April 2004 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-building (UNTOP) was established on 1 June 2000 with the support of the Security Council following the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan. In view of the important and positive role being played by UNTOP, I decided last May to extend the mandate of the Office for an additional period of one year until 1 June 2004 and informed members of the Security Council accordingly.

The Office continues to make an important contribution to addressing the challenges of the country's post-conflict transition. It provides the political framework and leadership for the peace-building activities of the United Nations system in Tajikistan and works to create and strengthen the political conditions for the irreversibility of the peace process. Accordingly, UNTOP encourages the continuation of national dialogue and reconciliation, facilitates the strengthening of democratic institutions and conflict-prevention mechanisms, promotes the rule of law and contributes to building national capacity in the area of human rights.

In support of dialogue and national reconciliation, during the past year UNTOP conducted 11 sessions of the Political Discussion Club on political pluralism, democratization, and consolidation of peace in Tajikistan. Over 1,300 officials from the central Government and local administrations, leaders of political parties and representatives of civil society participated in sessions in all provinces of the country. As a result of the Club's catalytic effect, new forms of partnership between the State and civil society have emerged and conditions have improved for the freer functioning of political parties. For the first time, representatives of political parties, including those in opposition, participated in central and district-level election commissions during the June 2003 constitutional referendum. Besides promoting political tolerance and dialogue, which has a healing effect on post-conflict communities, Club meetings produced concrete recommendations for Parliament on changes to the laws on local governance and parliamentary elections. The Club also contributed to the improvement of the accountability and transparency of local Government, allowing citizens to voice their concerns with officials, and the promotion of social partnership between the State and civil society.

The Office has continued to maintain close contact with the parties to the 1997 General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan in order to support the spirit of political compromise, facilitate dialogue and strengthen the still-fragile trust in Tajik society.

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In October 2003, UNTOP initiated a series of training seminars for State officials, political party functionaries and community leaders on conflict prevention and resolution. Focusing on strategies for resolving potentially explosive local issues, the seminars trained 90 participants and contributed to advancing the culture of political dialogue and debate in the country. Similar issues were addressed by UNTOP-organized seminars for media representatives and press secretaries of key government agencies.

With a view to promoting the rule of law in the country, the Office supported the development of national capacities of law enforcement agencies, seeking to accelerate their reform, combat corruption, and increase professionalism. The Office's civil police adviser worked closely with the Ministry of Interior to facilitate transition to peacetime policing in the country. UNTOP projects were aimed at expansion of forensics training and technical assistance as well as training on human rights standards for law enforcement officials. The Office organized round-table discussions on the draft "law on militia", which led to the introduction of provisions compatible with relevant international legal norms. UNTOP has also continued its support for the social integration of ex-combatants.

In the context of support to national capacity-building in the area of human rights, UNTOP implemented projects on treaty reporting and human rights education. The treaty reporting process has proved to be an important tool for implementing the country's international obligations in the field of human rights through improving national legislation and policies. The UNTOP human rights education project, which provided training to some 200 schoolteachers, has been an important instrument in building a culture of respect for human rights, tolerance and skills in conflict prevention. Mass media campaigns and the activities of the UNTOP-sponsored human rights information and documentation centre in the capital city raised awareness of human rights issues in the broader population as well. The Office continued to monitor closely human rights developments in the country and successfully intervened with the authorities in politically sensitive cases. Through its human rights thematic group, UNTOP facilitated coordination of the human rights activities of the United Nations country team, donors and international organizations.

During the past year the Office pursued project activities aimed at engaging youth at risk of involvement in drug trafficking and political extremism. Through cooperation with local non-governmental organizations, a resource centre was established in Dushanbe along with four centres for education in conflict prevention and human rights in those regions of the country where armed conflict had occurred.

The viability of the peace process in Tajikistan and the strength of its democratic institutions will be tested by parliamentary elections in early 2005. Upon the request of the Tajik Government, in April 2004 UNTOP facilitated a needs assessment mission led by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs. The assistance to be provided to Tajikistan aims at contributing to the improvement of the transparency and credibility of the 2005 parliamentary elections and at promoting democratization within the framework of the peace-building process. The holding of free and non-violent general elections in 2005 would be an important goal for UNTOP and an indicator of the achievement of its objectives.

In view of the important and very positive role being played by the Office, as well as the country's continuing need for support in its post-conflict peace-building efforts, and at the suggestion of the Government of Tajikistan, it is my intention to continue the activities of UNTOP for a further period of one year until 1 June 2005.

I should be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**